

CPS REFORM WATCH

CPS Reform Watch describes the progress made in implementing the reforms outlined in Governor Janet Napolitano's Action Plan for Reform of Arizona's Child Protection System and included in legislation passed during the 2003 special session. This monthly bulletin also is available on the Department of Economic Security's website at www.de.state.az.us and on the Governor's website at www.governor.state.az.us.

July 2004

Abuse or Neglect Reports Taken More Quickly With Hotline Triage System – The Child Protective Services Hotline has implemented a triage system for callers that links those wanting to report new allegations of abuse or neglect to a Hotline Specialist more quickly. Callers who want to provide updated information on existing cases, need other types of child welfare information, or want referrals to services can select Option 1 when calling the Hotline; they will be directed to staff that can provide the assistance they need. About one-third of the callers to the hotline in the past month have selected this option. Individuals wanting to report abuse or neglect can select Option 2 and are connected directly to a Specialist. This has significantly reduced the wait time for those calling in new reports and allows the Specialists to take as many as 12 to 15 abuse or neglect reports per hour.

Group Focuses on Faith-based Recruitment of Foster and Adoptive Families – A committee working on foster and adoptive parent recruitment has formed a subcommittee to focus exclusively on faith-based organizations. The subcommittee held its first meeting in late July and focused on information gathered by Division of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) staff and faith-based representatives who attended the recent Adopt US Kids Summit in Washington, D.C. The group decided to plan a statewide forum to include child welfare officials, licensing agencies and faith groups to discuss recruitment goals, barriers and strategies to reduce or eliminate barriers. The group also is looking into geographic mapping to determine where the largest numbers of children are coming into care from in order to engage faith communities in those neighborhoods to recruit foster parents and better support children coming into care and their families.

Family-Centered Practice Framework Being Developed – The National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice has been working with DCYF on a framework for case planning that builds on the family's strengths and encourages family members to be part of the case-planning team. This framework will guide the creation of standards of practice, supervisory activities and day-to-day interaction between families, social workers and the community of caregivers and providers.

Seminars for CPS Supervisors – Increased training and support for CPS supervisors were identified as key issues in both the Governor's Commission and in a survey of supervisors last year. DCYF is planning a series of "Critical Decision-Making" seminars for supervisors to focus on key decision points in the life of a case. In addition to the seminars, DCYF will encourage supervisors to meet on a regular basis to share their insights and experiences on actual cases. Supervisors may also form peer mentor groups to build on their seminar experience.

Youth Weigh In On Key Issues, Mentoring Program – The statewide conference for youth in the child welfare system was held in July. One particularly well-attended and lively workshop

focused on gathering information from youth on a mentoring program to meet their diverse needs. Among the suggestions from the group was to form District-level advisory boards to design programs that meet the needs of local youths and build on communities' strengths. Another suggestion was to promote a wide age range for mentors, as some youth feel more comfortable with younger/older mentors. Information from the youth conference will be used to develop five to six program initiatives for the coming year.

Consortium Focusing on Recruiting/Retaining Quality Staff – Arizona CPS is participating in a 5-year federal grant to determine the best strategies for recruiting and retaining quality child welfare staff. The Western Region Recruitment and Retention Project began earlier this year and is being spearheaded by Colorado child welfare officials, the University of Denver and the American Humane Association. The group is currently conducting focus groups in several states; staff in one urban and one rural Arizona CPS office are participating. The group also is planning a conference in Denver for January to bring together practitioners from several states to discuss the current challenges in recruiting and retaining staff.

Annie E. Casey Foundation Family-to-Family Site Visit – During two weeks in July, DCYF participated in site visits by representatives from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. These site visits assessed Arizona's readiness to become a Family to Family program site. Several focus groups were held with service and treatment providers, foster parents, case managers, supervisors, biological parents, foster youth, community partners, DCYF staff, licensing staff and others. These focus groups provided information about child welfare in Arizona. Four core strategies are the hallmark of Family to Family and will be a focus as DES/DCYF begin work in this area. They are: recruitment, training and support of resource families (foster and relative); building community partnerships; team decision-making; and, self-evaluation using data to show where progress is being made and where change is needed. The Department will submit its formal proposal to become a Family to Family site, which will then receive a final response from the Foundation.

Jury Trials for Severance Hearings – There was one trial held in a severance case during the month of July; the jury returned a verdict terminating parental rights. Since February, there have been a total of 13 jury trials in severance cases – 1 in Phoenix, 10 in Tucson, 1 in Bullhead City, and 1 in Yuma. In 12 of the 13 cases, the juries terminated parental rights. This action frees the child for adoption to a safe, permanent home. In cases where verdicts do not favor severing parental rights, the department will continue to work with the family with the goal of returning the child to the home when it is safe to do so. The child is not eligible to be adopted or placed in a permanent home unless additional grounds for severance arise and/or until further efforts to reunify the family fail and severance is eventually granted. There are 28 cases pending statewide in which parents have requested jury trials for severance hearings.

Expansion of the Open Hearings Pilot Program – In legislation passed during the special session, the Open Court Pilot was expanded to include all Arizona counties. Information on the process and documents used to implement the Maricopa pilot have been shared with judges in all counties. Staff from the Division of Children, Youth and Families and the Attorney General's office are working with the courts to ensure that the pilots are implemented and evaluated according to the statute.

So far, pilot programs have been started in Apache, Cochise, Coconino, Gila, Graham, Greenlee, Mohave, Navajo, Pima, Santa Cruz, Yavapai and Yuma counties; Pinal County is expected to begin its pilot program in August, followed by La Paz County in September.

Implementation of the Governor's Action Plan, legislative changes that occurred during the 2003 Special Session, and other efforts to improve the state Child Protective Services system are coordinated through a statewide network of action teams. These teams include representatives of the Division of Children Youth and Families, as well as other Department of Economic Security staff from services such as Family Assistance, Employment Services and Developmental Disabilities. Most importantly, these teams include dozens of neighborhood leaders and community-based organizations working in partnership with state officials to keep kids safe and families strong.